ISSN 0712-7774

$2.25USA • $2.75CANADA • £1.25UK

CEREBUS
mothers & daughters
22

172
JUL

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

These columns on self-publishing (and the PRO-CON speech) have met with a very enthusiastic response. As I write this, 171 hasn't shipped yet, but I expect Gary Reed's 'Guide to Self-Publishing' will prove a welcome addition. I might even reprint it from time-to-time along with any additional comments and suggestions that pertain.

****

A lot of people have misinterpreted my anti-company stance, thinking that what I am saying is that they should not work for Marvel, DC, Dark Horse, Valiant, Mirage, Rob Liefield, etc., etc. under any circumstances. There can be nothing more beneficial on many occasions than going for a cool and relaxing dip in a swimming pool. Likewise with the companies. A dip into their pool can be very relaxing, lucrative and prestigious. But you should get in and get out within a certain time frame. You don't want to live in a swimming pool no matter how cool and refreshing it is, do you? I've talked to too many friends in the business who started freelancing for the companies as a temporary measure who are still just freelancing twelve years later. When they finally walk away (or are thrown away), they will have nothing to show for those years apart from whatever is left of their advances, page rates and royalties. I had a nice chat with a fellow at *Heroes Con* in Charlotte, North Carolina (great Con, by the way. Highly recommended) who had just attracted the interest of Richard and Wendy Pini for their company-owned Elfquest line. Never had anything published before. As he explained it to me, he had been on cloud nine (naturally enough) at the prospect of becoming a Pro. Then he read the Pro-Con speech and was more than a little unsettled by it and wanted my advice. The best advice I could give was to decide what it was that he wanted. Did he want to be drawing someone else's characters ten years from now? Well, no, he didn't want that. Five years from now? Two years from now? I told him that whatever length of time he decided he wanted to work on someone else's characters, he should have that period set firmly in his mind at all times. That he should measure that length of time from the initial overture (Richard and Wendy had expressed interest a few weeks before). Always include the negotiating process in the length of time you are allotting for working on material that you don't own. You might not see a script or a contract for three months. That's three months of your 'career' that shouldn't be discounted; three months of treading water. As I mentioned in the Pro Con speech (and I probably should have emphasized it a little more), you should always be working on material that you own and control while you are working on material that you don't own and control. Working on well-known characters can be a great help when it comes time to self-publish. When talking up Jo Duffy's self-published *Nestrobber* at the trade shows, retailer interest increases quite a bit when you mention that Jo is the writer of the best-selling *Catwoman* series for DC. A number of retailers I've talked to have had great success cross-marketing *A Distant Soil* with the *Sandman* trade paperbacks, billing Colleen as a Sandman artist. Now, just to give you a contrast with that, James Owen, now that his right hand is getting back in shape, has eight issues of *Starchild* finished and is ready to ship bi-weekly through the summer to get back on schedule. The book is starting to attract a lot of attention from the retail community (especially at the trade shows) and his commitment to sticking to a bi-weekly schedule until he gets caught up and monthly thereafter is playing no small part in that increased attention. Of course he's now getting overtures from the work-made-for-hire companies to work on some very prestigious projects. He's had to make a hard choice; do work-made-for-hire stuff to get his name better known and use that name recognition to give *Starchild* a higher profile, or stick to his original plan and count on a reliable monthly schedule to build circulation. James (God bless 'im) has chosen to build *Starchild* on his own. One of the factors that figured into his decision was the awareness that he would be billed in his convention appearances as 'James Owen, *Batman* artist and *Starchild* creator' and that most people would want him to autograph his work-made-for-hire material. If you want to walk the tightrope between work-made-for-hire and self-publishing you should always be aware of the calendar pages flipping past and which of the two is consuming most of your time both in the short term and long term scheme of things. No one can tell you what balance is right for you. Each creator has to decide the balance for him or herself.

****

I'd just like to add that there was a behind-the-scenes dust-up between Diamond and myself over their 'no autographing in the exhibit room' rule for the Seminar a couple of weeks before the event itself. I thought the Seminar was going to be a shambles, but it was a very effective format. You were right and I was wrong, Dan.

CEREBUS

NO. 172 **JULY 1993**

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 188)

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 189 to Cerebus 200)

CEREBUS IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC. P.O. BOX 1674 STN. C, KITCHENER, ONTARIO, CANADA N2G 4R2

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PRINTED IN CANADA BY **PRENEY PRINT & LITHO INC.**, WINDSOR, ONTARIO.

WHUT IN..
THET BUZZING NOISE
NGG

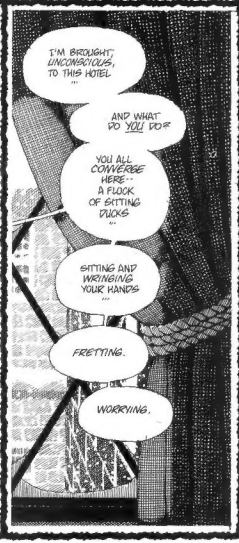
GREAT ASTORIA?
MM.
THEY'RE ...
THEY'RE GOING TO KILL US
AREN'T THEY.
YES. THEY ARE.
DOES THAT BOTHER YOU?
WELL YES!
I MEAN.
NO ONE WANTS TO DIE.

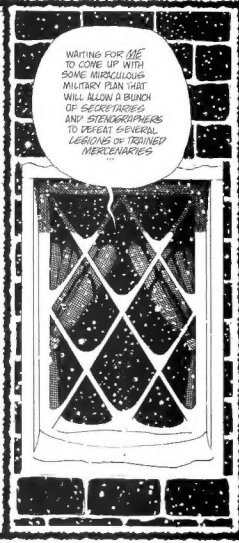
ON THE CONTRARY
I'VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO MY DEATH SINCE I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD...

BUT -- YOUR WORK...
YOUR MOVEMENT.

MOVEMENT?
THIS ISN'T A MOVEMENT ANYMORE...
IT'S A CHARADE
A FARCE...

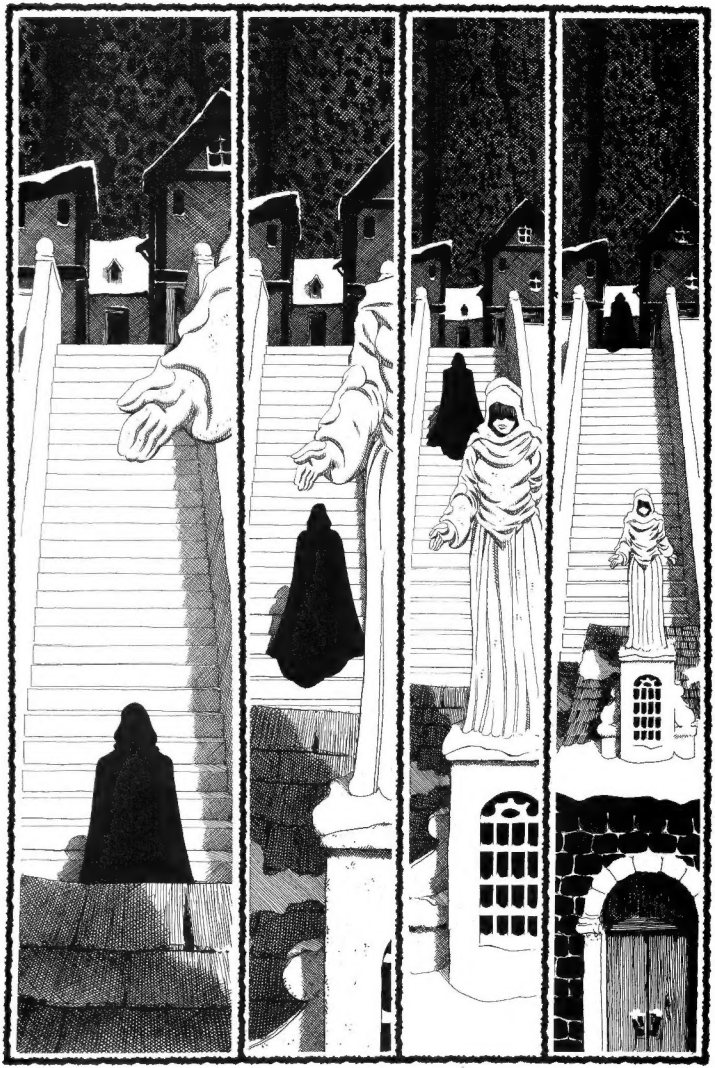
I SPENT YEARS CONSTRUCTING A CELL SYSTEM IN THIS CITY
PENETRATING ALL OF THE CRUCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF THE CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENT
...


I'M BROUGHT, UNCONSCIOUS, TO THIS HOTEL
...
AND WHAT DO YOU DO?
YOU ALL CONVERGE HERE -- A FLOCK OF SITTING DUCKS
..
SITTING AND WRINGING YOUR HANDS
...
FRETTING.
WORRYING.


WAITING FOR ME TO COME UP WITH SOME MIRACULOUS MILITARY PLAN THAT WILL ALLOW A BUNCH OF SECRETARIES AND STENOGRAPHERS TO DEFEAT SEVERAL LEGIONS OF TRAINED MERCENARIES
...

WELL, IT ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN.
WE'RE GOING TO DIE.
GET USED TO IT..
B-BUT GREAT ASTORIA...
WHEN HAVE I EVER ASKED YOU TO CALL ME THAT?
YOU JUST DON'T GET IT..
ANY OF YOU
I'M NOT A DAWN QUEEN
I'M NOT A DAWN GODDESS
I
AM
ASTORIA
PERIOD!
I TRIED TO TEACH YOU HOW TO LIVE LIKE HUMAN BEINGS ...STRONG... INDEPENDENT
AND OBVIOUSLY I FAILED..
GO OUT AND JOIN THE OTHERS... I'LL BE OUT AS SOON AS I'M DRESSED.
IF I CAN'T TEACH ALL OF YOU HOW TO LIVE, MAYBE I CAN TEACH YOU HOW TO DIE..

KLIK
CLAK



Cirin:
No no. You're flipping the pages too fast.

Dorana:
I'm sorry. Perhaps if . . .

Cirin:
No. It just isn't going to work. Let me think.

Cirin:
We'll just have to move the books themselves. All of the shelves which have been purified; move all of those books to the end of the library which faces the Ascension site. All of the shelves which haven't been purified; move all of those books to the opposite end of the library.

Dorana:
Yes, Great Cirin.

Cirin:
You'll have to work quickly. We're running out of time as it is.

Dorana:
Yes, Great Cirin.

If there was ever a more concrete example of the sheer willful and contrary nature of daughters when they are allowed to roam the corridors of power, unchecked and unfettered, it is the Eye in the Pyramid. Ostensibly based on an ancient and marginal philosophy, it amounts to little more than disobedience and rebelliousness as political theory. Fortunately the adherents of this cult are easily discovered and rooted out; a wise and organized leader has only to seek out those areas of government where information and decision-making are regularly impeded or neutralized and remove the person responsible. It is less a political movement than it is a haven for misguided pranksters.

Cirin
The New Matriarchy

The Eye in the Pyramid (unlike the ancient symbol of wisdom) is located in the middle of the pyramid, not at its apex. It applies to all hierarchical systems. As applied to Kevillism, it is an illustration of the power which resides at the so-called lower echelons of hierarchical systems. Anyone with any experience in government or business knows that those supposedly in power have only a cursory awareness of how the system operates, and a nearly complete ignorance of the day-in day-out exchange of information, book-keeping and paper-work which is its life's blood. Through my writings on the Eye in the Pyramid, I endeavour only to make secretaries, book-keepers, executive assistants and others aware that they, and not their superiors, control the levers of power. That awareness is my sole motivation and the goal I wish to achieve. What they choose to do with that awareness, once they have achieved it, is entirely up to them and of no interest to me whatsoever.

Astoria
Kevillist Origins

ALL RIGHT..
WHO KNOWS HOW MUCH LAMP OIL THERE IS IN THE HOTEL?
THE--THE HOTEL HAS GASLIGHTS
I'M AWARE OF THAT THERE STILL HAS TO BE A BUFFPLY
GASLIGHTS ARE FAIRLY NEW
EVERYWHERE BUT THE REGENCY.
BRING THE OIL HERE
WE'RE ALSO GOING TO NEED LARGE GLASS CONTAINERS FROM THE KITCHEN
LAMPS AS WELL.
THERE ARE THREE IN MY SUITE ALONE SO THERE SHOULD BE QUITE A FEW...
WE'RE GOING TO NEED THEM ALL. EVERY LAST ONE
I KNOW I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW...
ASTORIA.
WHAT?

SORRY TO INTERRUPT
BUT I THOUGHT THE WHOLE IDEA OF THIS..
'MOVEMENT'
..WAS TO SHARE THE DECISION-MAKING..
NO LEADERS.
NO FOLLOWERS
NOW IF YOU HAVE A PLAN... I'M SURE WE'D ALL LOVE TO HEAR IT
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU JUST WANT TO SNAP YOUR FINGERS ...
AND HAVE EVERYONE JUST FETCH AND CARRY FOR YOU ..
MAYBE YOU SHOULD HAVE STUCK WITH YOUR MALE HOUSE PETS.

HEN SHE HAD shared her dream that morning with Cirin, this was exactly what Astoria had been able to see for the first time. The complaint was valid. Had she not just reduced a young woman to tears by insisting that she was not a queen, not a goddess? and yet here she was, striding about the room, barking commands, using her personal magnetism, her charisma to sweep these women along a chosen path. She could feel all eyes in the room upon her, awaiting her answer. All her ideals and the newly-awakened awareness of her own folly wanted, simply, to agree. 'Yes. You're quite right,' she wanted to say. 'Let's sit down and discuss our options.' But even as the thought came, she knew that was not what she would say. Already she felt herself swept into the momentum of events; the irresistible tide of disaster which loomed before them all. She was not helpless to affect the outcome; in point of fact she was choosing helplessness. Despite her protests, she *was* a leader and even as she assessed all the inherent contradictions; the rightness of the woman who had dared to challenge her authority, the hypocrisy of her own position; her mind was weighing a variety of replies; not on the basis of what was right, but rather on the basis of what was expeditious; what would produce the proper effect. She was simultaneously amused and appalled that the proper effect she sought was blind and unquestioning obedience. A mere handful of seconds had passed, but all her experience told her that the balance of opinion in the room was very much in favour of obedience. Had she felt the momentum shifting in favour of this newcomer, she would have thrown a tantrum (as well as some heavy and fragile artifact at a key moment in her monologue as a kind of punctuation). The fear in the room, however, was her greatest asset at this point. Her reply needed to be calm, deliberate and succinct. It needed only an undertone of blame; only a suggestion that she, Astoria, could yet save the day and her followers' fear would do the rest. Her followers. If she was not a queen or a goddess, why did she always refer to them as followers? With practiced ease, she shifted her weight from her heels to the balls of her feet and began to speak.

YES OF COURSE
IDEALLY THAT WAS THE WAY THINGS SHOULD WORK
OF COURSE IDEALLY ALL OF YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FLOCKED TO THIS HOTEL
IDEALLY YOU SHOULD STILL BE MANIPULATING LEST FROM WITHIN...
ANONYMOUSLY
SOME OF YOU STILL HAVE...
THOSE WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO GATHER AROUND ME...
HOWEVER.
WILL JUST HAVE TO TRUST THAT I'M MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES
UNLESS
OF COURSE
YOU WANT TO PERSUADE US ALL TO FOLLOW YOU...
LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TOGETHER...
I'LL BE IN MY SUITE.

SEE -- NOW YOU'RE MAKING SOME PROGRESS
YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE BARS
I'M ONE OF THE HIGHER PRIMATES
Yes... I think
I see.
SHUP SHUP SHUP
IT'S EVOLUTION
THREE STEPS FORWARD
TWO STEPS BACK
I am the Lord of Dreams once more ...
Thank you for your ... kindness
now there is ...
much to do
and so I bid you a fond
er a uh fond ...
DOORS ON THE OTHER HAND,
DOORS ARE REEAL 'TR DKY
ONE MORE?
please

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave,

Last night, I made five copies of your *Campaign '93* outline to pass out to the local comic shops. Tonight, I just finished typing in the announcement of *"The Collegiate Hepcats"* into the packets for the three comic shops in the mall I'm going to tomorrow. It's amazing what a couple months and some curiosity can do.

When I heard you were writing an issue of *Spawn*, which I read, and that Cerebus was going to be in it, I wondered who the hell you were. A couple of months ago, I picked up *Cerebus* #164 to see what it was like. Now I'm hooked.

In one issue I saw *Sandman*, the nature of men and woman, politics, and religion all spoofed. This comic has some balls. I was amazed by the excellent art and the superior writing. I had found a comic book that was at the same intellect I was. The letters page is a bit weird though, seeming that there are two or three real life soap operas going on.

Speaking of the letters page, Charles Brownstein has a valid point in issue #168. When I was really young, I began collecting comic books with *Transformers* (bad art, bad writing, and another Marvel/Hasbro conspiracy to sell a toy). When that was cancelled, I ignored comic books for a while. Then last year I hooked up with a couple of friends who introduced me to Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane, and the X-books. I started reading *Spawn* and the X-books, and collecting back issues of *Spider-Man*. After all the big name artists left Marvel, I quickly became tired of Marvel's lousy writing and cheesy gimmicks (*The X-ecutioner's Song* was the biggest rip-off). *Spawn* was so much better.

Then, when I was in one of the comic shops in the mall, I saw an issue of *Sandman* for a buck fifty. I had seen all the *Sandman* trade paperbacks, and figured something must be special about the book. I bought the issue, and am now a regular reader. I explained how I got into *Cerebus* before.

There is the evolution of a comic book reader. I am eighteen, going to college next year, and currently reading *Sandman, Cerebus, Spawn,* and *Excaliber* (the writing's way above average (for Marvel anyway and Alan Davis is the only great artist who *hasn't* left Marvel). It all started with (gag) *Transformers*. Proof that there are practical uses for crap.

I'll cut it off here until I get to know the book better. I don't want to take space away from the hardcore fans. Will be waiting with baited breath for *Cerebus* #0.

And I'm on Nicole's side.

John Hampton III
Keyport, NJ
USA 07735

Yeah. Every once in a while, I have to stand back and get a grip on myself. If it wasn't for those mounds of atrocious work-made-for-hire super-hero stuff, I wouldn't have the audience that I do. If you look at it optimistically, the worse Marvel and DC treat their freelancers, the quicker they leave, the worse the books get (because they're all being done by newcomers) and the sooner the customers start looking at what else is available. Good point.

But I still think work-made-for-hire sucks.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

You were in a dream of mine last night. I was riding a bus down Hennepin Ave. with a friend of mine (oh, that's a street in Minneapolis) and you got on and sat in front of us. I whispered, "Do you know who that is?" and my friend said "Yeah, that's Dave Sim" which is weird because this particular friend doesn't know what Cerebus is or anything. But it was a dream so it seemed perfectly normal that she recognized you. Anyway, I was too shy to get up and talk to you, but sitting next to you was Grant Hart, formerly of the rock band *Hüsker Dü*. I've never been a big fan of that band (not since the *Land Speed Record* era anyway), so I was *not* too shy to go up and talk to him. So I did, and it turned out that the three of us (you, me, my friend) all got off at the Franklin Ave. stop, so I gathered up my courage and said hi to you and asked what brought you to this neck of the woods. You smiled and said, "What brings me to this neck of the woods?" when a good-looking young woman with short hair and several old copies of *Cerebus* in her hand grabbed your hand and led you into a nearby apartment building.

So who was she?

Wanting an introduction,

Tony Dunlop
2300 Harriet Ave., #106
Minneapolis, MN
USA 55405

P.S. No P.S.

The Franklin Avenue stop in Minneapolis? Jeez. That description could fit any number of chicks around there. You'll have to be more specific.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Hi, remember me? This is a follow-up to the first letter of mine you published, about a year ago, where I berated my fellow devotees to loan out their collections. *Campaign '93* is exciting and all, but if you readers out there haven't loaned out your collections to a prospective convert yet, then you don't deserve a Gold Logo Cover, and you know it! Get on it! I've got my eye on you.

Twenty-Five Words or Less, eh? Ok, how about this . . .

Practice what you preach. I moved from upstate New York to Southern California, leaving entire collection behind with potential fan, including signed, illustrated book. Fearlessly.

I did it, so could you! Do I make you ill? I'm so fucking sanctimonious I make MYSELF ill. I'm fiercely anal retentive, also, so you know it wasn't easy. What's your excuse?

Enough. Next, a bit of a warning, if you would, to Mr. Darren

O'Shaughnessy, whose letter was published in issue #169. Beware the backlash of *Cerebus* Overdose! I, too, "discovered" the book and went on a chronological rampage. "Soon, soon I will be Contemporary" you assure yourself, as you greedily read until dawn, ignoring responsibilities and primary biological needs. Beware! The Epiphany at finding a copy of *Cerebus Jam* or *A-V in 3-D*, or, ye gods! an *Animated Cerebus Portfolio* is a high more addicting than any base opiate, any crude hallucinogen! And then the Fall! The completed collection! Suddenly the prospect of WAITING FOR MORE is the harsh reality dominating your life; thirty issues in one night to one issue every thirty nights! Do you know what happens when you downshift from fourth into first? Disaster! Trauma! Suffering! None but the true followers can attest to the agony of the dreaded phrase "sorry, it's not in yet." Cruel, Cruel, O Sim, O Gerhard! Pace yourself, Darren. Let not the Aardvark control you! I know I'm not alone in my pain.

But fear not. After a few months of lurking in the cellars of dark depression, whispering to yourself things like "sewage, sewage, sewage" and picking fitfully at the bones of some other comic, you learn to enjoy the anticipation. Eventually, you'll get a job again, and resume bathing, and normalcy will slowly return to your life, and the monthly satisfaction of a good, meaty letters page will rank high on your list of simple, private pleasures. But never forget!

Actually, I did find a copy of '3-D' recently, and the "Normalman" segment was autographed by Valentino. I only paid three bucks for it! What poor fool let THAT slip away? And the Epiphany comment is no joke, lest you should doubt this haughty oracle. I went into near paroxysms of lust right there in the store, followed by a cold, primal fear that there WASN'T ENOUGH CASH IN MY WALLET. Does this shit sound familiar to anyone? Or am I just a (gulp) fanboy?

Oh yeah, Dave, if they haven't gone to print yet, how about including the nearly impossible to find segment 'Night on the Town' in the *Cerebus* Number Zero book? Everyone who's seen it assures me it's hysterical, and the hunger, the HUNGER . . . it burns.

Still Devoted,

Brian Zatkow
1801 S. Federal Ave. 208
Los Angeles, CA
USA 90025
(hey, Joel!)

P.S. Kyle? Could I have my books back, now? Please?

We are in the preliminary stages of planning THE ANAL RETENTIVE CEREBUS which will reprint everything Cerebus has been on or in since 1977 that is not in the phone books or CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO. Nice working title, don't you think?

★★★★★★★★★★

Hey, Dave,

I've managed to salvage the majority of the returns of the *Austin Chronicle* Cerebus issue. I'd say I've got around 5–800 copies out of a print run of about 70,000. The rest, being the fleeting thing that weekly newspapers are, have largely become cage liners by now. I figure if I offer copies to your readers at $3 a piece including postage and packaging (quarter-folded, as this sort of paper is normally mailed) that would basically give me a buck each for my trouble. Are you jake with that? Of course, being a newspaper, these things are not Overstreet funnybook mint, even when they come off the press, but for the more übercollector fanboy types, I'll hand-pick a real nice copy and mail it flat for five bucks. And tell you what, Dave, after I've milked this for what it's worth (give me a couple of months or so), if you want to pay for the shipping of the remaining issues, I'll just send you the lot to do with as you will.

The issue, besides the color Sim/Wagner *Cerebus* cover, two page interview and full color *Hepcats Presents* strip also contains a nice Harvey Pekar prose story. Oh, and as a distributor of said issue, I recorded at least two (2) "Hey, it's *Cerebus*!" comments as I went about my route and zero (0) "What the hell is this?" queries. I'm also the guy who was set to do the interview before Martin offered his services and became the obvious choice, as well as the fellow who gave you the topless photos of Death when you were in Killeen. I should mention that those are hardly candid shots. In Austin, girls can pretty much walk around topless wherever they want and Cinnamon (the original model for the *Death* character, for those of you who are confused) often would go shopping as you see her in the picture. Currently, we've lost her in, we think, New Orleans (are you reading this, Dringenberg?) but are hoping someone can help us locate her, as DC Comics doesn't even give her a free *Sandman* subscription for her trouble and also 'cuz we need to get her in front of the camera before DC uses that teen bimbo from the *Death* mini-series covers again.

Ken Lieck
2606 Wilson St., #207
Austin, TX
USA 78704

Hey, I'm jake with that. Wise, too. Y'get me?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I read with dismay your answer to Kurt Busick's letter in *Cerebus* 168. While I can't speak for how Diamond does things, I can certainly speak for Capital, since I personally determine all extras over our customer's orders that we order on all comics, comic based trade paperbacks and graphic novels. What dismayed me was your suggestions that we only order extras on "hot" books and that what is considered "hot" is "directly related to how much money was spent advertising it in the catalogue." While a certain amount of scepticism is probably healthy, this comment is not only incorrect but paranoid.

It is incorrect because when I am determining how many extras to bring in on every title, I have no idea which are being advertised in our monthly catalogue, *Advance Comics*. Not only that, I don't care! The purpose of extras is to satisfy re-order demand from our customers. On periodicals, our goal is to have extras available for re-order for at least two weeks. For trade books and graphic novels, our goal is to have them continuously available as long as demand remains consistent. The comment is paranoid because it supposes some sinister unknown reason we might have for not wanting to sell extras that there is a demand for.

Actually Capital expends considerable effort to determine how many extras of *every* comic, trade book and graphic novel we can reasonably expect to sell. The process goes like this: every title is

counted twice, first after the initial orders are pulled to see how many extras we actually have, second, after two weeks have passed to see how many we have actually sold. Both the number of extras sold and the number of extras left over are converted into a percentage of the initial orders. I get reports each month that we call our Inventory Flow Report. I then use this report to make an educated guess of how many extras we should order for titles coming out in the future. It should be remembered that all retailers and distributors do when they make their orders each month is make educated guesses. None of us has a crystal ball. If anyone has one for sale, let me know.

We have had this system in place for over eight years and over all it does a fairly good job at predicting re-order demand. It does, however, have two inherent flaws. First, it's based on past experience, which is not always an accurate prediction of the future. Just because *Superman* #75 was a huge seller with fantastic re-order demand, does that mean *Adventures of Superman* #500 will be the same phenomena? Not necessarily. That's where the guessing really comes in — number one's, special issues, cover enhancements — all the things that make distributors and retailers get grey hair. The second problem with our Inventory Flow Report is that it only shows how many are sold and how many are left, not how many we could have sold. To counter that serious problem we now have, as part of a new computer system we installed in October '92, a Demand Report. This report shows how many orders we have received for each title every month, whether we are able to fill those orders or not. This quantity I then add on to the next issue of that title we order. These quantities are brought into our Sparta, Illinois Distribution Center to supply re-orders throughout the Capital system.

Contrary to the statement that re-orders are only available on "hot" books is the fact that many of the biggest selling titles have the lowest re-order demand because retailers have already ordered enough of them. *Uncanny X-Men*, for example, for years one of the top selling titles, is one that we order a low percentage of extras on for that very reason. Extras are only needed when demand is under estimated by retailers, usually because demand is increasing at a faster rate than they can keep up with on the initial orders. Since retailers and distributors are in business to make money, believe me we all want to order as many copies of each title that we can reasonably expect to sell. By the same token, since retailers and distributors order on a non-returnable basis, no one wants to get stuck with copies that can't sell. These two statements sum up the basic nature of the direct market that has allowed the comic industry to grow and prosper over the last 15 years or so.

Concerning your statement that you have "yet to speak to any retailer who has been able to get an issue of *Cerebus* on re-order," we do not stock back issues of any periodicals. We just don't think that's our job as a wholesale distributor. We do, however, sell a considerable number of *Cerebus* current issues on re-order. Periodicals come out on a regular basis and either sell out or don't. If they do sell out, their price as a back issue may increase assuming there is unfilled demand. If that demand can't be filled then reprints and trade paperback collections may be appropriate. This is certainly the case with the *Cerebus* paperbacks, and we make every effort to keep all of them in stock all the time.

I hope this gives some insight into the effort that Capital gives to filling re-order demand. If we were smarter than all of our customers we would always have the copies they weren't smart enough to order in the first place. Unfortunately, we can't always be that smart, but we try.

On a personal note, I am proud to have been distributing *Cerebus* since issue #5 and have really tried to do my best for it since it is one of the few comics I read as soon as it hits our warehouse. I will also say the Aardvark Comment is a lot more fun to read now that you are back to making personal comments again — even when you say things that make me tear my thinning hair out.

Sincerely,

John Davis
Capital City Distribution, Inc.
P.O. Box 8156
2537 Daniels Street
Madison, WI
USA 53708

I'd like to thank John for taking time out of his busy schedule to join the on-going re-order discussion. I think the Demand Report is a great idea which should assist a great deal with many of the problems built into the direct market as constituted. I think one of the on-going problems is that most comic books at this end of the market (marginal black & whites) sell steadily and continuously; not within the two week 'window of opportunity' allotted for periodicals. Someone who is interested in *Hate* or *Eightball* or *Yummy Fur* is going to want more than the current issue; they are going to want every issue, as well as all of the other work by the creators responsible. I would agree that as the distribution end expands, it is impractical to expect the distributors to make everything available continuously. I think it *would* be practical to provide the address and phone number of the publishers and to encourage retailers to order direct on material that falls outside of that "window of opportunity'. In the case of Cerebus any re-order for issues more than a month or two old could be answered with a notation 'No longer available from Capital please contact etc., etc.' Much of the frustration on the part of retailers stems from not knowing what they can reasonably expect to get on re-order. They would like to order the first six issues of *Bone* in quantities of five or ten copies and they would like to do it every three weeks for the next ten years. Diamond and Capital (and everyone else) will undoubtedly keep the *Bone* trade paperback in stock forever, but we do end up with a 'Continuity Gap' between the trade paperback and the current issue with titles like *Cerebus, Sandman, Bone, Hepcats.* I think if the self-publishers (and small companies like Fantagraphics, Drawn and Quarterly, etc.) would agree to limit their direct sales to stores to back issues not available on re-order and trade paperbacks not stocked by individual warehouses, that a workable compromise would be possible. A few of the more aggressive retailers have even proposed 'adopting' warehouses; if the warehouses would agree to order a large quantity of *Bone, Starchild, Hepcats, A Distant Soil,* etc., the retailer would agree to purchase any remaining copies after 45 or 60 days. Several proposals of this kind are sitting unanswered on desks in Baltimore and Madison. Any solutions to the 'Continuity Gap' would be welcome here in the pages of Aardvark Comment.

★★★★★★★★★★

Mr. Sim,

I'm not the type of person who comes to Cons to get my "hot" books signed by "hot" artists. I come primarily to show my story ideas and meet artists to work with. I also enjoy sitting down with creators and just talking. I was able to do this with great success last year, discussing numerous topics with Dan Jurgens, Keith Giffen, and the delightful Mart Nodell. You were the creator I was looking most forward to talking to this year. Unfortunately, the "Spawn-filled" line leading up to you was far too long to have a decent conversation. I'm kind of disappointed because I respect you so much as an artist. The complexity of *Cerebus* has inspired me to new creative heights. Gone are my desires to write *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*. I want it all. Like you I want my characters to live and breathe in the minds of readers. I want to tell *my* story *my* way, under *my* terms. The process is slow. I've had a small bit of success this weekend in regards to my work appearing in *Negative Burn*, a new anthology premiering in July. I also met a young artist today who has the same hunger in him. Your articles about breaking into the business in *Cerebus* have been sobering, but also inspiring. I know I've got the talent and desire. I know the road is long. Shit, I'm only twenty years old. My whole life is ahead of me. And writing is my whole life.

I apologize. I've just realized I've turned this letter to you into a therapy session/pep talk for myself. I hope you know how much I respect you and your work. Thank you for creating Cerebus. Thank you for inspiring me. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Robinson
213 Wyndham Way
Indian Trail, NC
USA 28079

Thanks for coming by the table. It's going to take a little while for the *Spawn 10* excitement to settle down ('Are you Dave Sims? Did you do that guy with the big nose in *Spawn 10*? Mr. Sims, I gotta tell you I just discovered *Serbius* and I think he's great!') which is one of the reasons I'm discussing self-publishing and creator-control in the Note from the President. The subject is way too big and way too complicated for your average two minute convention chat.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

Enclosed is an article I thought you might enjoy. Do you know what days you will be attending the San Diego Con (I have to plan accordingly!)? Also, I know you're not a big fan of the super-hero genre, but what do you think of Valiant and the new Dark Horse and Malibu ventures into the super-hero arena?

These new books appear to be more concerned with quality than the big two. I love *Cerebus*, but I also enjoy a well written, intelligent super-hero story (sorry). Do you see a new "movement" within the super-hero line or is it wishful thinking on my part. I'd really like to hear your opinion.

See you in San Diego,

E.A. Hennig
15752 Mussey Gr. Rd.
Ramona, CA
USA 92065

P.S. Alan Moore is doing a Marvel-ous parody of 60's era comic books at the moment. The title is *1963* and it's published through Image. Check it out! Excalibur!

Valiant, Dark Horse and Malibu are doing work-made-for-hire super-hero titles. The company owns the characters and hires people to write and draw those characters. Some good stuff and a lot of crap will be the result. The company is in control, not the creators, so you can expect musical chairs creative teams that last three to five months at the most.

★★★★★★★★★★

So I go into McDonalds last night after work to grab some burgers for dinner and one of the two kids in front of me has the Sim *Spawn* with him. "I just read that last night", I tell him, "It's a great story . . ." "Yeah?", with the surprise of a thirteen year old who discovers for the first time that grown up real people (in ties yet) read comics too. "Yeah, it's all about how companies like Marvel and DC took ownership of characters like Spiderman and Batman from the men who created them . . .", I spill out cuz I figure the kid might not get it at first — and it is a great story so I don't want him to dismiss it. And his buddy says, "Batman's gonna die, y'know. This is where it starts", holding up his newest issue with pride. And I wanna say yeah, the hype of a new marketing ploy begins here and the *Spawn* boy says "Which Superman do you think is the real man of steel?".

So I tell him.

It's either the cyborg or someone they haven't introduced yet.

Rob Lavender

Yeah, I heard they cut off Batman's legs and the new Batman's costume is the coolest; like *Spawn* but gray and black.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

For the past 5–6 months I have been absolutely "out of" comics. For some unknown reason I just lost interest. Then a week ago, I decided to find out how much money all my comics were worth.

Since I'd been collecting since I was 13 (I'm now 16) I was hoping for some pretty valuable comics. In the end my collection turned out to be worth roughly $2,000.00. After adding and multiplying for 3 hours I was already to seal the boxes and move the collection and comics themselves out of my room and life. But I just couldn't resist reading the first *Cerebus* bi-weekly. I was hooked all over again. Then I remembered that you once sent me a letter, responding of course to a letter I sent you a long time ago. It had an awesome quote in it and I remember it even now, it was: "If you really want to do your own comic nothing and no one can stop you; if you don't really want to do your own comic nothing and no one can help." Anyway, I went scourging through my room to find it and it wasn't there! I know I had it on my bulletin board for a long time but I can't remember where I put it! I have a "drawing spot" and I was going to frame that letter and put it up there but now I can't. Needless to say, I'm back into comics and collecting *Cerebus* again, along with *Spawn*, but *Cerebus* is still #1. I still hope to someday be a comic artist and even do my own character independently like you. I draw every day and I'm getting better and better. But when I look up at that blank wall above my drawing table I get hugely pissed at myself for losing your letter. Anyway, I'm writing to ask you to please write me a letter once more. I promise I won't lose it and you can be sure it'll go right by my drawing table keeping me motivated and the friends I have converted to *Cerebus* very jealous. Not to push it, but if you do write back please do a little sketch of Cerebus on it. Believe

me it would be priceless! I'm planning on ordering all the reprint volumes I need very soon and when I call I might also want to buy 50 *Cerebus* #0 regular logos to get that gold logo one like Craig from issue #169. I'm writing *Now and Then Books* for info on back issues and *Cerebus* shirts, so if I get the shirts and the 50 #0's I'd just hang out at my local comic store and hand out 49 of those suckers and get even more people hooked. I'd be the walking *Cerebus* ad and proud of it. Anyway, thanks for reading this letter, I hope I can look forward to reading yours.

Sincerely,

Luke Walker
2 South 660 Angeline Ct.
Warrenville, IL
USA 60555

Send me photocopies of a twenty page comic book story by the end of this year and I'll be happy to send you a replacement letter. C'mon. You can do it.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Greetings from the great fishing grounds of Alaska.

Today I got my mail!

And, no, there wasn't a copy of *Cerebus* in it. But what there was was some Xerox copies of your letters column as sent to me by my pal as per my request months ago.

So what am I doing writing you a letter if I've never read your comic?

It seems that you have been printing numerous letters by a friend of mine and hacking out a love in the public eye. It all sounded quite amusing so I had him xerox these copies and send them to me.

You see I happen to know both Rob Lavender and Nicole Rodney.

As for Larry I've only heard his name and read his letters in Aardvark Comment.

So I guess I'm writing this in part to kill time and in response to Nicole.

Nice letter! Unfortunate that those couple of juicy paragraphs were excised. Sorry Larry!!

It's unfortunate that I'm not a reader as I would love to prove Nicole's #2 theory wrong, but at least now there's another variable for her man gauge. The person that isn't a *Cerebus* reader that writes in regardless.

Now my question is, since I'm miles away from a post office, how much postage should I put on this envelope?

Amused by it all,

John Huber
P.O. Box 81072
Fairbanks, AL
USA 99708

P.S. You should see the car Rob was considering driving to see you. It's a mess . . . .

I'm sorry to say your letter never got here, so I'd put a lot more postage on the next one in I were you.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I just bought issue #169 and instead of telling you how great it is, I think I'll rant and rave a little bit. The lady at the comic shop I bought issue #169 from said something interesting to me. What did she say? She said, "Oh, I've never seen this one before." I quickly told her how *Cerebus* is the greatest book in the world (maybe she could pan a couple issues off of the fan-boys with that phrase). She then asked if *Cerebus* was part of my subscription and when I said yes she simply stated, "That's probably why I haven't seen it before." Am I to understand that they order just enough for us people who have a subscription for *Cerebus*? OH HORROR! Am I to understand there will be *NO* copies of *Cerebus* #0 for me? OH SHIT!

Now is the part where I hit you up for a favor. Will you please, please, *please* offer *Cerebus* #0 to us through you? Being a relatively new reader, this issue might help me to understand the story better. I can't afford all the phonebooks and if *Cerebus* #0 offers *ANY* insight on this epic I would gratefully appreciate having a copy.

Anyway, time to get personal and bring the letters column back to us psychos who can't understand life or love. The girl I love doesn't love me (pretty cliched, huh?). She says I'm too depressed and down on myself. Like her not returning my calls helps any? What does she expect — I'm a goddamn artist. We're supposed to be depressed (aren't we?). I really love her (her name is Tressa) but I don't know what to do, and any advice from someone I look up to and respect would be appreciated. (Do you feel like Dear Abbey now?)

peace and love

Scott Stripling
85 Bostic Street
Norcross, CA
USA 30071

P.S. I just re-read my letter and it seems I called myself a relatively new reader. Is a year and a half a long or short time? Considering I only started reading comic books three years ago, I don't know.

P.P.S. Any other *Cerebus* readers in Norcross? I feel so lonely!

P.P.P.S. Here's my personal list of "good" comics:

Gregory – Marc Hempell
Bone – Jeff Smith
Madman Adventures – Michael Allred
Cerebus – You
Spawn – Todd McFarlane
Maxx – Sam Kieth
Boris the Bear – James Dean Smith
Groo and the Mighty Magnor – Sergio Aragones
Swamp Thing, Sandman, The Incredible Hulk, the Heckler (is Keith Giffen still doing that one?) and the *Hellblazer* book is pretty decent.

Getting depressed is how you get rid of a chick, Scott. To attract them you have to be happy, funny and carefree. Just remember 'happy and funny to get them; depressed to ditch them'.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I too have used my own blood for lipstick. I was inspired to write and tell you about it by Jessica Shook's letter in issue #169.

Last summer I was playing a gig with my band 50 HOT LESTER, jumping around like crazy while singing, when I accidentally slashed open my finger on the serrated edge of a half-busted drum cymbal. With the blood flowing out, I smeared it around my mouth while singing these lyrics:

I'm putting on red lipstick
I was a boy but now I've switched
I've changed my pants for
  pretty dresses
because boys are second bestest

Look at me, I'm a girl
I'll do a ballerina twirl
Look at me, I'm a girl
Ballerina out of control

I'm putting on red lipstick
I was a boy but now I've switched
I'll be a girl full-time, not just
  a hobby
Surgeons will rebuild my body

Sincerely,

James Kochalka
33 Buell St. #3
Burlington, VT
USA 05401

P.S. The above lyrics are ©1992 by James Kochalka, but you have permission to reprint them in your letters column.

Sounds like a real toe-tapper.

★★★★★★★★★★

I was bored earlier today, so I took a walk down to *Future Dreams* to get a few issues of *Melmoth* and I don't have. But I came in 10 minutes before closing, and they didn't have anyone to send downstairs to see if they had any issues since the back issue bins were barren of any issues from the middle of *Jaka's Story* to issue 164. As I went home, mentally kicking myself in the pants for not leaving earlier, I decided to fill up my time by writing to Aardvark Comment.

I'm writing in response to Nick Eden's letter in #168. First off, I should say that I think that *Sandman* is not just good, it is one of the top ten best comics in the field now. I don't however think it is the absolute best for me, and that is all the matters to me. If a comic pleases it's readers, it is a good comic.

I like *Cerebus*. I like *Hepcats*. I like *Sandman, Death, Spawn, Green Lantern: Mosaic,* and even the *Uncanny X-Men*. *Cerebus* is a comic I can read many times over, and still enjoy the story and spectacular art. *Hepcats* is the same. It has a great story, with realistic art and good pacing. I like *Sandman's* mystical beauty, and I like that the artists change after each storyline, giving each story arc it's own feel. *Death* was a nice, relaxing comic that made the characters extremely real to me. *Spawn* doesn't have the best story, but it (if nothing else) has bitchin' art. *Green Lantern: Mosaic* gives me alot to think about, and Cully Hamner is a pretty good artist. And the *Uncanny X-Men* is 20 minutes of time for my brain to shut down, and just look at John Romita Jr.'s stuff. But that is just me. I wouldn't expect you to change your reading styles to suit me, and I won't change them for you.

Just like Charles Brownstein said, these comics all serve a purpose. But I don't believe that the "lower class" comics should be considered as steps on the ladder up to such comics like *Eightball, Hepcats,* and *Cerebus.* They are just as good as any others, because they please the audience. If they don't please you, fine, don't read them. But I'm sick of being bashed simply because I read them. How many of the people who insult readers of comics like *X-Men* and *Youngblood* (I don't get that, but I read my brother's. I think it is pretty bad) actually read those comics? How do you know how bad they are?

I started reading really simple comics. The first comic I ever got was *Power Pack* #17. I then got all of the *Indiana Jones* and *Transformer* comics. I sold those, and got into the *X-Men*. Then, when *Batman* came out, I began to get alot of *Batman, Superman* and *Flash* type comics. And about a year ago, I started to read the comics that make up the core of Vertigo; *Sandman, Animal Man,* and *Doom Patrol.* And in November, I started getting *Cerebus.* I grew out of *Indiana Jones* and *Transformers,* but not because they were bad, my interests just changed. But I still have that issue of *Power Pack,* and I still like it. And if that is something to make fun of, have a ball. But it entertains me, and that's all I can ask for from a comic.

So people, read what you want, but keep your mind open. Don't close something off because it is "too mainstream" or "too alternative"'. Both sides are doing that to *Green Lantern: Mosaic,* and it's dying. All because of stereotypes. And if you can't have an open mind, that is your right. Just don't insult me because I do.

Kevin Covey
440 NE Laddington Ct.
Portland, OR
USA 97232

Your *first* comic book was *Power Pack* 7? My first comic book was *Superman* 165 which came out in November of nineteen mumble mumble.

★★★★★★★★★★

25 or less:

I live in the *Cerebus* ***Wasteland*** and cannot find those issues and have no chance for gold issue. Will hug and squeeze issue.

Dear Dave,

I would like to clarify a few misperceptions and misstatements about Charlottesville. It actually is not a *Cerebus* ***Wasteland***, as Craig Garnett called it. I am relatively new to your book, but as of yesterday, with the release of *Flight,* I have been able to acquire a complete run (in some form) of all the long storylines. Most being in the form of the collected volumes. I've purchased 99% of the books here in Charlottesville. Being self-employed can really limit one's budget, so I could not afford the issues even if I could find them. Also, I feel that it is the material that matters and not the form it takes. Although I miss the letters columns when buying the "phone books".

I'm a regular file customer at one of the two stores under a single owner. I am also the only file customer signed up for *Cerebus.* I can tell you for a fact that this store orders ***exactly 3*** copies of *Cerebus.* I buy one, one sells off the shelf, and usually one gets put in back issue. This store has the best selection of back issues of *Cerebus* that I have seen. Over Christmas holiday, I went to Chicago for a vacation. At the time I needed about 15 issues ranging from 137–present. I visited 5 different *Moondog's* stores and found a grand total of 2 issues, both 2nd printings. Many of the stores had no issues from 125-present at all. The sad fact is retailers are only ordering what is hot. I also know that the store I shop at goes above and beyond to make their customers happy. Many obscure books have been found for me and other customers. Their file minimum is 5 titles, not 10 as Craig said. And, under special circumstances, they will reserve one book if that is the only book a customer wants.

In a perfect world, everyone would have what they want, all the time. A gold issue would be nice, but isn't the important thing what's inside the book? I hope this truly does increase your sales. I also hope the issue of *Spawn* will increase sales. Yours is one of only two or three comics I could recommend to non-comics readers and be guaranteed of an approval. One thing that would generate new readers would be the availability of the "phone books" in local shops. I was lucky enough to advance order them last time they were available. But they haven't been solicited since then. I know a few people

that would buy the current issues if they could purchase the collections at the comic shop, but they can't. Please make the collections more accessible to distributors. Thanks for reading this, and I look forward to the next 100+ issues.

Bill Schneider
Rt. 12, Box 23A
Charlottesville, VA
USA 22901

Craig,

Having read your letter in *Cerebus* #169 I felt I had to respond to several of your inaccurate statements. First, I'm confused as to which comics shop you are refering to. You mention ". . . their two stores," well, *Fantasia* has two stores but then you refer to my store's *(Daydream Books)* pull-service policy. *Daydream Books* is a separate entity and is not connected to *Fantasia* and never has been. You then go on to say the shop ". . . order[s] exactly two copies" of *Cerebus*. I order about a dozen copies and Fantasia tells me they order more than "exactly" two per month in each of their locations. Where this "exactly two copies" information comes from is a mystery to all of us. There may be only a couple of copies on the rack by the time you arrive but more were ordered, trust me. As to not knowing when the next issue is coming out, I'd have to plead guilty. I know this may be hard to believe but comics store owners don't know when all 300+ titles they order are coming in unless someone (publisher or distributor) gives them an accurate shipping schedule. I have no way of knowing which week *Cerebus* is expected because no one tells me. As to your attempt to order fifty *Cerebus* Zero for the gold edition, you never had that discussion with me. While I would have required a deposit, I'd have gladly placed the order and given you a discount and the gold edition. I've done similar deals in the past. Both *Fantasia* stores tell me no one ever made that offer to them either. Frankly, your accusations are the products of confusion, fabrications, or both. When I see Dave Sim at the *Heroes World* trade show next week I'll give him a copy of this letter to correct your description of Charlottesville as "A ***Cerebus Wasteland***".

Scott Saternye, Owner
Daydream Books
218 W. Market St.
Charlottesville, VA
USA 22902

Dear Scott,

Thanks for your recent letter. Just to clear things up, my letter to Dave Sim was in no way commenting on your shop, since until I got your letter today, I was unaware that there were any other shops in Charlottesville besides the two *Fantasia* stores. I'd been told when I first arrived at the Law School here in the fall by friends that the only shop in town was *Fantasia,* and I guess I didn't bother to check up on what I'd been told. The pull policy that I mentioned in the letter was the one explained to me by the manager of the *Fantasia* up on 29 North in the fall: five titles or more required for pulled subscriptions. As for my "exactly two copies" per store statement, I've been in both the Corner and 29 North *Fantasias* on the day that new comics came out (currently late Wednesday afternoon) and found exactly two copies of the most recent copy of *Cerebus* on the shelves. It is of course possible that there are more copies someplace in the back of these two stores, but I don't think that's likely.

I'm not surè why running down the person I spoke to about the *Cerebus* Zero's is so important, especially to the owner of a competing store, but I spoke with someone at the *Fantasia* store on the Corner about it early in March. The same person who had once told me that "We don't get much *Cerebus* here," he was wearing a black t-shirt and had long, dirty hair. When I asked him about a special order, he said "OK, what do you want?" and after listening to my admittedly strange request, told me just what I said in the letter: prepaid, no discount and the store would keep the gold issue, presumably to auction off as the *Fantasia* on 29 North is currently doing with a platinum *Death of Superman.* Maybe the guy thought I was just giving him a hard time and he was just trying to get rid of me. Maybe he was just a flunky who thought he'd have some fun with me. I don't know, nor do I really care. It's *Fantasia's* problem, not mine.

Under any circumstances, my unfortunate experiences with *Fantasia* are completely irrelevant to you or your shop. I'll be happy to drop Dave a note telling him that I'd overlooked another, more reasonable shop in Charlottesvile, to clear up any misunderstanding about who I was talking about. I regret any inconvenience or embarrassment my letter may have caused you. As for my comments about *Fantasia,* I stand by them, though I understand your concern about your own shop may have led you to brand them the products of "confusion, fabrication, or both." They are the products of neither.

I am pleased to hear, though, that there is another comic shop in town, and although I don't buy enough books to qualify for a pull subscription at your store, either, what I do buy will in the future come from you, assuming that you will forgive me for my unintentional slight. I do apologize for the misunderstanding.

Sincerely,

Craig Garnett

Another *Cerebus Wasteland* theory bites the dust. Thanks to Bill and Scott for bringing these letters by the booth at the *Heroes World* trade show.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I'll admit it. I'm a new reader. I think *Cerebus* is terrific. But I wasn't inspired to write this letter by the art or the story, even though they are both some of the best I've seen in a comic. The reason that I'm writing is that I take offence at Bruce Harper's remarks in his letter published in issue #169. Yes, Todd McFarlane had a small part in my decision to buy by first issue of *Cerebus.* another factor was the interview you did in *Wizard.* Just because I was unenlightened before is no reason to call me a "bandwagon jumper" now.

If Mr. Harper would stop to think for a minute, Todd simply told his readers to take a look at *Cerebus,* which is (unless I'm gravely mistaken) exactly what *Campaign '93* is trying to accomplish. Now that I've gotten started, I'll keep reading until the quality drops off, or until issue 300, whichever comes first. This statement has nothing to do with Mr. McFarlane or anyone else. The simple fact is that I *like* your book, and the number of other people who buy it will in no way influence my decision stick with it.

Ryan Scherle
2243 W. Division Rd.
Jasper, IN
USA 47546

Except for the fact that almost all of them pronounce it "Serbius", I couldn't be happier with the mass influx of *Image/Wizard* guys.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

Please allow me to begin this note with an apology for my medium. Unfortunately I have no current access to a typewriter.

That done, let me say to you that I have found the most expensive place in the world to purchase Cerebus the Aardvark. It is the *Forbidden Planet*, on Dawson St. in Dublin, Ireland.

How do I know this? When I was living there recently, I found that the aforementioned planet was the only (repeat ONLY) comic shop in Dublin that sold *Cerebus.* The price? Irish Punt 2.25 (in case you haven't been keeping up on the international money markets lately, the Irish Punt is roughly as strong or stronger than the British Sterling, widely recognized as the most powerful piece of currency in the world).

I just thought you might like to know this.

Robert Baranowski
12 Clifton Terrace #3FI
Edinburgh, EH12 5DR
UK

P.S. Cheers! to Harry Payne's letter in issue #169. *Deahead Comics* is the definitive comics shop in Edinburgh. Only one question though — How did the lucky stiff find a female *Cerebus* fan? (I've never met one before . . .)

We're trying to arrange an Ireland stop for the UK Tour this fall. Hey, why should Scotland and England have all the fun, eh?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

Unlike a lot of the others, I am not going to bore you with rants about the music I'm listening to while writing (Ron Post's *Road Kills*) or the excess / deficiency / lack of sexual activity of myself or others (what's this about Cerebus BITING OFF a woman's clitoris? Couldn't he just playfully nibble at it or something?). In a word. I'm just dropping you a line or three.

Well, last Friday I made my monthly raid on a couple of comix shops in town and picked up (among other things) *Cerebus* number 169; as usual the story left me in a flummoxed state as it always does whenever I first cast my eyes over it (one problem I have is that your Roach character has, over the years, become — for want of a better word — "referenced" to whatever ephemeral super-hero fad happens to come along; since I have made a super-heroic effort to remain ignorant of this crap, I miss out-on a lot of it — like, what's with that THING hanging off his face like a trunk?!? I'm not sure it's worth the effort to find out, though). Your "Note From The President" was certainly an educational one: I have done some work with Higgins Waterproof India Ink and found, as you say, that it's too watery, it tends to smear and fade when I run an eraser over it after it dries — recently, however, I was pleasantly surprised to find some ink that was behaving itself properly for once. To make a dull story short, it was just evaporated. Seeing you vindicated in one place, I may try my hand at using a pen (a crowquill awaits me e'en now at my desk); it will take a lot of practice, not that most things worth doing well don't.

Among the other things abovementioned that I carried off to my dungeon last Friday were three issues of *Comics Journal.* Now, no doubt *CJ* is a very useful thing to have around (my issues carried interviews with Bill Griffith and Drew Friedman, for example), but this rasslin' match between yourself and Gary Groth has long since lost what little relevance it may have had in the beginning, assuming it ever had any. All those speeches and analysis of speeches, ad nauseum — I lost track a long time ago and have other. better things to do (and so do you, I imagine). Obviously it's a case of unrequited love on Gary's part, since he's the one who seems to be keeping it going — you know, "you always hurt the one you love" — I don't need to tell you to watch your ass when he's around

I am enclosing some photos of the *Cerebus Hepcats Jam '92* print (OK, xerox) that has been ornamented by you and Martin Wagner, placed so that it is very nearly the first thing I see in the morning. One day some weeks ago, while admiring the thing, a sudden thought struck me — that Cerebus and Erica have a pretty strong facial resemblance, especially around the schnozola. Now, Mista Wagner has never (so far as I know) specified what species Erica was supposed to be and I have always before now assumed she was one of the commoner sort of ungulant such as is often encountered here in Texas; however, what if Erica is . . . an aardvark? In fact, what if Erica is THE THIRD AARDVARK that people keep mumbling about in your story??? T'rim's Tush, wouldn't that make Cirin and Astoria sit up and fart! I certainly don't want you to give away any of the future story line at this point in time, so you may regard this as an entirely rhetorical question, requiring no answer.

Right now I have nearly all of *Cerebus,* except for numbers 155 and 157 which I missed when they came out for reasons that remain unclear — none of the comix-mongeries here seem to have any copies, though they have enough of the other issues around them. Pretending that you may be interested in how I keep my stash of comix in order, what I do is: first, put the thing in one of those bags; second, put the bagged thing in one of those clear "sheet protectors"; and third, put the whole mess in a three-ring looseleaf binder. It looks odd, and I'm not sure what the long-term effect will be, but it seems to work all right and I can leaf through my collection like leafing through an album. Not being a speculator myself, I can state that the term "mint" should only be applied to postage stamps; as used to describe a comic book, it makes no sense at all.

Well, it's getting late here and I'm starting to wind down, so I'll just cut it off here for now.

OK
William Haskell
P.O. Box 692186
Houston, TX
USA 77269-2186

I thought it would be very funny to have a booth in San Diego some year where I would offer to 'de-restore' comic books; one dollar to turn 'mint' comics into 'fine' comics. Two dollars to turn 'mint' comics into 'fair' or 'poor' comics.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

When I saw the schedule for your personal appearances and realized you would be close enough (in Charlotte) that I could finally meet you, I began making plans to get there, one way or another. However, a nagging thought keeps

coming up, regarding a passage I read somewhere that says that the nicest thing you can do for a con guest is to leave them alone. They are strung out on too much air travel, too little sleep, indifferent (or worse) food and endless meetings with wellmeaning, worshipful fans who just have to blurt out — sometimes incoherently — how much *Cerebus* (or whatever) means to them personally. How the guest is supposed to remain pleasant through all this is beyond me ("Go away or Cerebus is going to stripmine your face").

Since I have a pressing *need* to blurt out how much *Cerebus* means to me personally, I will do it here, as briefly and coherently as possible, and spare you one more forgettable encounter with a tongue-tied Con-goer.

Why am I so fond of a short-tempered, avaricious, alcoholic, talking aardvark? Because he is so much like me. Not the face I show to the world — 31 year-old human services worker with ministerial training, quiet, teetotaler, dependable — but the part of me that is fed up. "Cerebus has no time for fat ladies . . .". "Cerebus thinks that might prove difficult, . . . with nothing but bone fragments holding your knees and ankles together." How many times have I wished I had the gall to be rude, be honest, and *demand* what I want from other people? Cerebus is genuine, which is a rare and beautiful thing.

He is as genuine in his virtues as in his faults. His confused, possessive love of Jaka, his reckless dislike of inaction, his subconscious affection for the Regency Elf, his absent-minded but death-grip hold on an old ragdoll. His refusal to commit suicide on two occasions, despite the overwhelming bleakness of life at these points.

And the real beauty of Cerebus is this — despite his myriad faults and half-baked virtues, despite his inability to really be in *control* of his destiny — Cerebus is an instrument of Tarim Himself. Because of the dreams of this disreputable, selfish earth-pig, granite towers of incredible size grow in minutes — corpses long dead utter strange words — dying men beg for a kind word from him.

Gee, it begins to sound a little presumptuous that I say Cerebus is like me. But isn't it when we are the most genuine, the most truly ourselves, that God *can* really use us? When Tarim knocks, Cerebus answers the door — full of self-delusions and insecurities, but free of social veneer. Tarim doesn't ask him to be perfect — he asks him to be Cerebus. But Cerebus is not an admirable character, and hardly a role-model, you say? Oh, I don't know. I hardly intend to become a money-grubbing, scotch-guzzling pope anytime soon. But I could aspire to worse things than being genuine. Saying what I really mean, instead of what I think people want to hear. Not wasting my time on apologies and explanations "for politeness' sake." Not constantly trying to "improve" myself by denying my anger, my selfishness, my humanness. Not making myself over in the image of what's expected of me. And remembering that action is almost always better than not moving.

Cerebus is like me — angry, grasping, egocentric — and Cerebus is how I aspire to be — forthright, spontaneous, integrated. Tarim obviously approves, and somehow I'm quite sure God will, as well. I'm not talking about being an earth-pig clone — I'm talking about being *me*.

Next to a primitive wooden horse hand-carved by my father, my most valued possession is the inked Cerebus you did for me ("A hundred and four dollars. Cerebus feels so . . . so . . . *used*.") I hope this letter is clear enough to give you an idea why your creation is so important to me. Thank you for your time, Famous-The-Aardvark, and thank you, Dave, for sharing him with us.

When I see you at the Con, I'll restrain myself and keep quiet. But I *will* smile.

Sincerely,

Linda Cody
512 Dogwood Court
High Point, NC
USA 27260

I'm writing this in the departure lounge of the Charlotte, NC Airport. Evidently it all became too much for her and Linda came up and introduced herself. Although (much to my regret) she disappeared a few minutes later. Story of my life.

★★★★★★★★★★

DAVE SIM PERSONAL APPEARANCES
1993

JULY 31
WINDHAM, MAINE
Casablanca Comics

AUGUST 19–22 SAN DIEGO
Comicon

SEPTEMBER UK TOUR '93

LONDON
SEPTEMBER 15
Fantastic Store

SEPTEMBER 17–18
UK Comic Art Convention

ABERDEEN
SEPTEMBER 19
Plan 9

GLASGOW
SEPTEMBER 20
AKA Books

EDINBURGH
SEPTEMBER 21
AKA Books

NEWCASTLE ON-TYNE
SEPTEMBER 22
Forbidden Planet

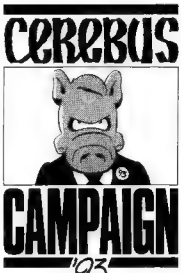
BIRMINGHAM
SEPTEMBER 24
Fantastic Store

NOTTINGHAM
SEPTEMBER 25
Fantastic Store

SALISBURY
SEPTEMBER 29
Floppy Tongues

OCTOBER 2, 3
DEERBORN, MICHIGAN
Motor City Con.

NOVEMBER 27, 28
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Mid-Ohio Con.



'Operation Crazed Ferret is happening.'

Dear Dave:

Operation Crazed Ferret is happening. I've successfully fetched the files from two sites in CA and Glenn assures me that more from that list we sent you earlier are on the way. They're cool. Glenn did a fine job. We finally met as I passed through Chicago on Monday—wouldn't you know he's a nice guy. After three months of purely electronic contact (no phone, no mail, no in-person) we met and exchanged views on all sorts of stuff that had no bearing on how we get money to feed ourselves. Which we also did. Almost yuppie-like, though neither of us look or live the part. It's good to have a face to go with the name.

Anyway, we've been chatting it up on the nets, and have members of the Junior Ferret Patrol in Russian universities, New Jersey high schools, and Newcastle England (Rich Johnston, who has put *Cerebus* in a university political mag, persuaded the local comics shop to sell copies of *Cerebus* at cost with any purchase of *Spawn* 10, and has his university selling them at their bookstore. Woo!) A few more have promised to advertise on various other forums. So, like a benign virus, Crazed Ferret spreads as we speak. Glenn showed me the letter you sent him, so I won't repeat his comments here. You can call/fax me (or him) if you've got questions, of course.

Lessee, what else? I think I mentioned this before, but out of the blue a fellow named Mike Lamps sent me an electronic version of *Free Cerebus*. Glenn is making it more portable and more widely available. But it should be available right now on two BBS's: Digital Civilization at 851-633-2227 and Infinity at 815-623-7996. One more site (Pentaru! at 815-654-7956) might carry it, but Mike's sysop friend Brian McGroarty is, in Mike's words, ". . . very, very, very paranoid about breaking copyright laws and will not carry any *Cerebus* promotions." Mike asked me to call him and enlighten him a bit, but hell, who am *I*? If you see fit to print some of this, *you* could let Brian know that promoting *Cerebus* electronically is as good for you as flossing after each meal; helps create strong bones and a healthy coat, and boosts the local economy (as long as you add the ©1993 Dave Sim bit). Or something.

Thanks for writing and drawing, and best wishes.

Though this doesn't really need to be a fax, I'm out of envelopes, stamps, and time to go to the post office. It's Saturday night and I'm at work anyway.

This is a quick Ferret-O-Gram to update you on progress that I know of with the Electronic Campaign.

1) Thanks to John Romkey, who has made the animations available for IBM compatible users, the potential distribution has now multiplied many times. Windows users can download the files via anonymous ftp from
asylum.sf.ca.us
in
/pub/cerebus/crazed-ferret
which is on the list I sent you about a month ago People should grab
README
bar.avi
bat.avi
sword.avi
vfwrun.zip (Microsoft's freely distributable Video for windows viewer)
cerebus.ps

So the animations now exist in a format that almost anybody with a personal computer can have. Now it's up to folks to spread the virus, er, files, making sure they customize them to mention the local shops that carry *Cerebus*.

2) Michael Martin of the Bronx is the newest addition to the Operation Crazed Ferret volunteer corp. While Glenn and I are both somewhat tapped out of time and ideas for the time being, it's good to know that letter of mine in 168 is still generating interest. New ideas are always welcome, not that people need to tell me about them or clear them with *me* before they start implementing them. (Though folks do seem to think I'm a clearinghouse for this sort of stuff. How un-Cerebus.) But Glenn and I are happy to publicize things you endorse on the networks.

3) Best news of all: We've got our first verified convert from the Electronic Campaign, a fellow from Houston whose name is withheld because I don't remember it.

As usual, thanks for writing and drawing (same to Gerhard).

p.s. What kind of response did you get from your Pro-Con speech? I can imagine it eliciting a mixture of blank, thoughtful, and crazy-gleam-in-the-eyes stares. Also attached is a better than usual (i.e. doubleplusplusgood) Feiffer that you may not have seen.

Jim Ottaviani
605 W. Hoover, #5
Ann Arbor, MI
USA 48103-5474

For the record (once again) Operation: Crazed Ferret has my blessing. As Jim notes in his letter, as long as the copyright Dave Sim 1993 is added, anyone is welcome to use the Animation program in circulation. New ideas *are* always welcome and no, you don't have to clear them through Jim or myself. Just keep me posted as to your progress so I can keep people up to date in this column.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Here are a pair of the first-run Cerebus/Star Clipper t-shirts we had done. I hope they meet with your approval.

We had them done by two of our customers, Jeff Hirsch and Ben Cohn, who own a small screen printing business. They are hanging onto to screen that they made for us as I am sure we'll need more later in the summer.

If the shirts meet with your approval, I'd appreciate it if you would pass their names along to other interested shops. Since they have the screen already, they can save other shops that initial set-up cost (and their usual rate is very reasonable).

Their business address is:

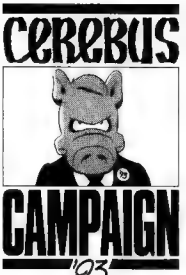
Pixel Perfect Designs, Inc.
12553 Post Grove Drive
St. Louis, MO
USA 63146
Telephone (314) 469-7064

Sonny and I will, of course be wearing them at the Diamond Trade Show and at the San Diego Comic Con. We'll see you there!

Cheers!

Carol Denbow, Star Clipper Books
8143 Delmar Blvd.,
St. Louis, MO
USA 63130

This is certainly a great idea. Anything which can save the CAMPAIGN stores some dollars on set-up costs can work to everyone's advantage. I'd like to thank Carol and Sonny, Marty Hyder and everyone else who brought me a sample CAMPAIGN shirt to the Diamond Seminar in Atlanta. I'm running out of space in my bedroom closet.



'Here are a pair of the first-run Cerebus/ Star Clipper t-shirts'

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I just finished reading your letter in *Comics·Retailer.*

I'm always open to unique promotional opportunities. Your *Campaign '93* ideas should help draw attention to *Cerebus* and other Black & Whites.

Please count me in on the promotional materials. I'll make good use of them.

Regarding the *Cerebus* buttons, when a button company makes custom buttons, they get much cheaper when done in quantity. You might find a button company to take orders from several stores and combine them to get a low price. That would make things cheaper and easier for most stores.

I had good luck with a custom run of "No Censorship" buttons we used for a political battle a year ago. The company was WHO, INC., now called B.W. TECH, at 818-457-6341.

Good luck with the campaign,

John Weddleton, Bosco's
2606 Spenard Road
Anchorage, AK
USA 99503

I'll be happy to print the names, addresses and/or phone numbers of button manufacturers that CAMPAIGN stores have had success with. The original printing of 300 CAMPAIGN packages (which I thought was more than a little optimistic) was depleted early in May. As of this writing (June 16) Preney has just finished the second printing which we should be able to get out to all of the new stores that have contacted us late next week. Sorry for the delay.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave:

If it's not too late to get on the mailing list for *Campaign '93,* please put us on. Through circumstances beyond my control, I just received *Cerebus* #167 today. I could tell you the whole sordid story of how my regular distributor neglected to send my order, then gave me a song and dance, and finally shrugged in disinterest when I begged (nay, pleaded) to get a few copies for my regular subscribers; but you don't really want to hear about that. Suffice it to say that I managed to track

down enough copies at a competitor's store, and bought them at cover price for my regulars. At any rate, the info on *Campaign '93* caught my interest. Being a bit of a conspiracy buff, I can't help but wonder if that info had any influence on my distributor's failure to provide me with my ordered issues. I suppose incompetence would be another explanation (not the first time that particular thought has crossed my mind when considering this supposedly "friendly" bunch).

As a retailer, I despair of the shameless money grubbing tactics of Marvel et. al., and I honestly try to steer my more literary-minded customers toward *Cerebus* (and the other high quality, non-superguy comics). Unfortunately, at this point I am restricted by the desires of the speculators and fanboys—if I don't have the latest X-title on the shelves Thursday morning, they will go down the street and buy 'em at the bookstore, and we go hungry I am therefore reduced to using the latest ploy to get the kids into the store . . .and attempting to convert those I can to the long running, story oriented comics like *Cerebus* and *Sandman* (and *Hellblazer*, and . . .). We have needed something like this for a long, long time.

By the way, good job so far on *Cerebus*, and thanks a bunch for *Spawn* #10. I for one am with you all the way.

Thanx Dave,

Darren Guyton, The Master Gamer
1205 Moro
Manhattan, KS
USA 66502

Again, I'd like to apologize for the delay in getting a second printing of the *Campaign '93* stores out in the mail. If you haven't got your package by the first week in July, please contact us again and we'll get them out to you.

★★★★★★★★★★

'A telephone interview is a wonderful alternative'

Dear Dave,

We at *Halley's Comics* want to extend our thanks for your visit with our staff and customers via our telephone interview on May 29th. We all thoroughly enjoyed the experience and we appreciate your openness to the idea in the first place

To all the other retailers of *Cerebus* out there, we encourage you to put together a similar event in your area. With Mr. Sim's permission, and a date and time chosen, you're all set to let your customers and the public know about it!

We used the *Cerebus* ad slicks to put together bag-stuffers and also used the illustrations to accompany releases to the local media. (The trick to successful press releases is to find out ahead of time to whom you should be directing your releases, and be sure to do follow-up phone calls a few days prior to your event.) We also preceeded the telephone interview with a two-hour comic mini-auction and donated half of the auction's proceeds to our local chapter of The Children's Wish Foundation!

For those of you out there on a limited budget, a telephone interview is a wonderful alternative to having Dave actually visit your store. If you don't already have a hands-free feature on your telephone (to allow everyone to participate) one can be easily hooked up to your existing phone by your phone company (ours costs us approx. $8.00 per month). The cost of the phone call doesn't have to be expensive either. An evening interview can take advantage of the lower rates available. (An hour can cost as little as $20.00.) There you have it! Now get to work!

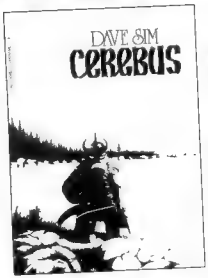
Finally, Dave, it was terrific to meet you at the Diamond Retailers Seminar in Atlanta. We appreciate your hospitality, and thank you for giving us the chance to meet the creators from *A Distant Soil, Hepcats, Bone,* and *Starchild* as well.

Continued Success!

Larry Lane – Manager
Halley's Comics
347 Mountain Road
Moncton, New Brunswick
E1Z 2M7

This, to me, is one of the greatest innovations in comics promotion to come down the trail in a long while. One of the biggest problems with in-store appearances is the amount of time they take out of your week. They are the most effective means of increasing sales, no doubt about it, but (as an example) for me to make an appearance at each of the *Campaign '93* stores alone would require travelling every weekend for the next six years. By contrast, the phone interview took a little over an hour and (as Larry points out) cost next-to-nothing. The only thing I would've done differently would be to send out twenty or so autographed comics to be handed out at the event itself; which would've made it a little closer to a 'real' signing. Stores interested in trying this are welcome to contact me by mail or fax; I'd suggest that you choose dates that are two to three months away so that as much advance work as possible can be done as well as giving me a chance to mention it in the book. Thanks, Larry. *Campaign '93* marches on.

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF



CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

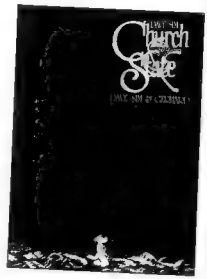
The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more

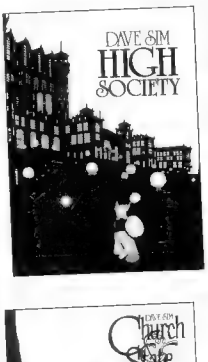
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in fast and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Iestan police

CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II
reprints Cerebus 51 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over





JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner and Mrs. Thatcher

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS IN 1993:

FLIGHT reprinting Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages ($17)

and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC.
Box 1674, Station C,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2
519-576-7820
Or
519-576-0610

LONDON
SEPTEMBER 15
FANTASTIC STORE
SEPTEMBER 17–18
UK COMIC ART CONVENTION

ABERDEEN
SEPTEMBER 19
PLAN 9

GLASGOW
SEPTEMBER 20
AKA BOOKS

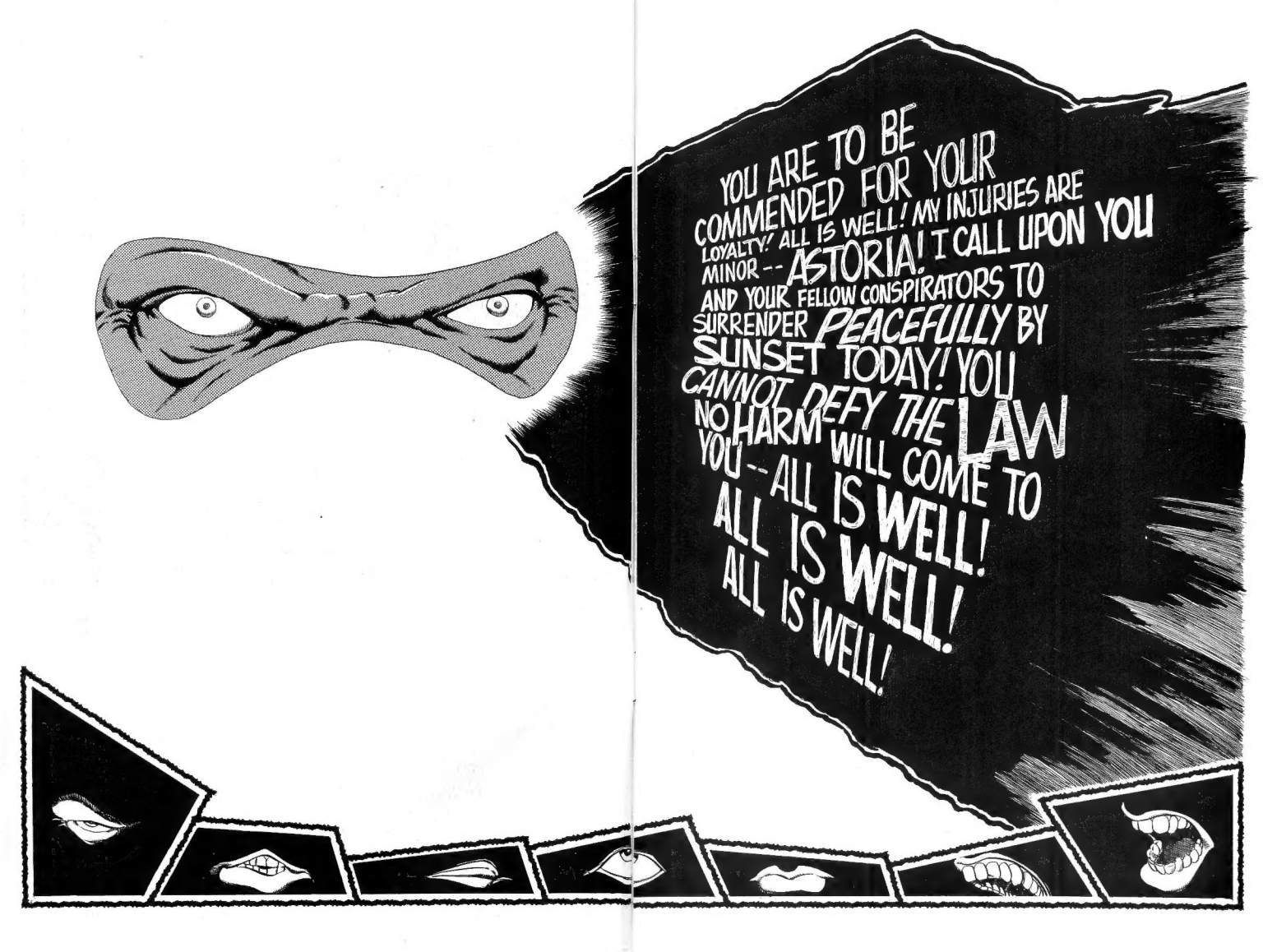
EDINBURGH
SEPTEMBER 21
AKA BOOKS

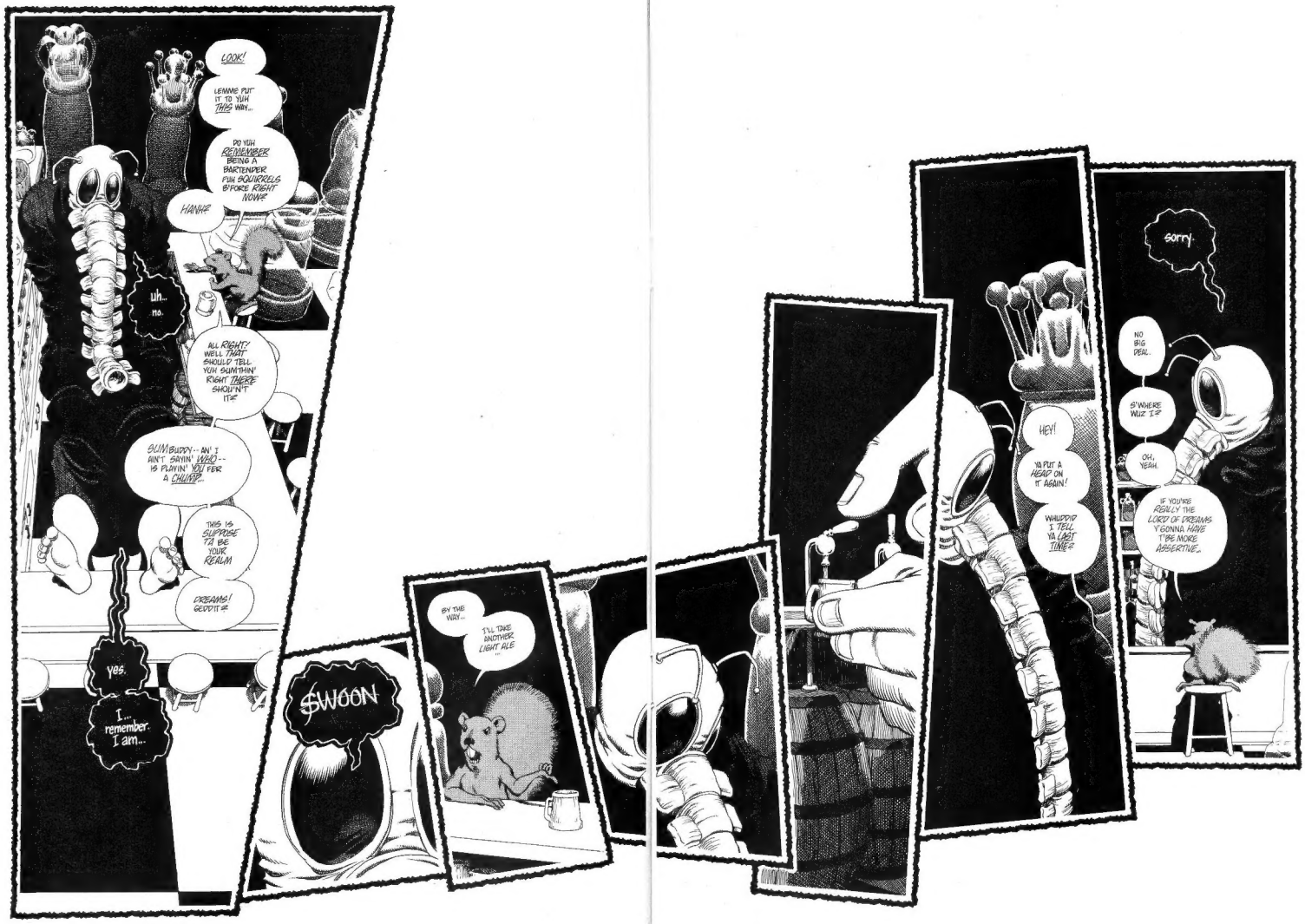
NEWCASTLE ON-TYNE
SEPTEMBER 22
FORBIDDEN PLANET

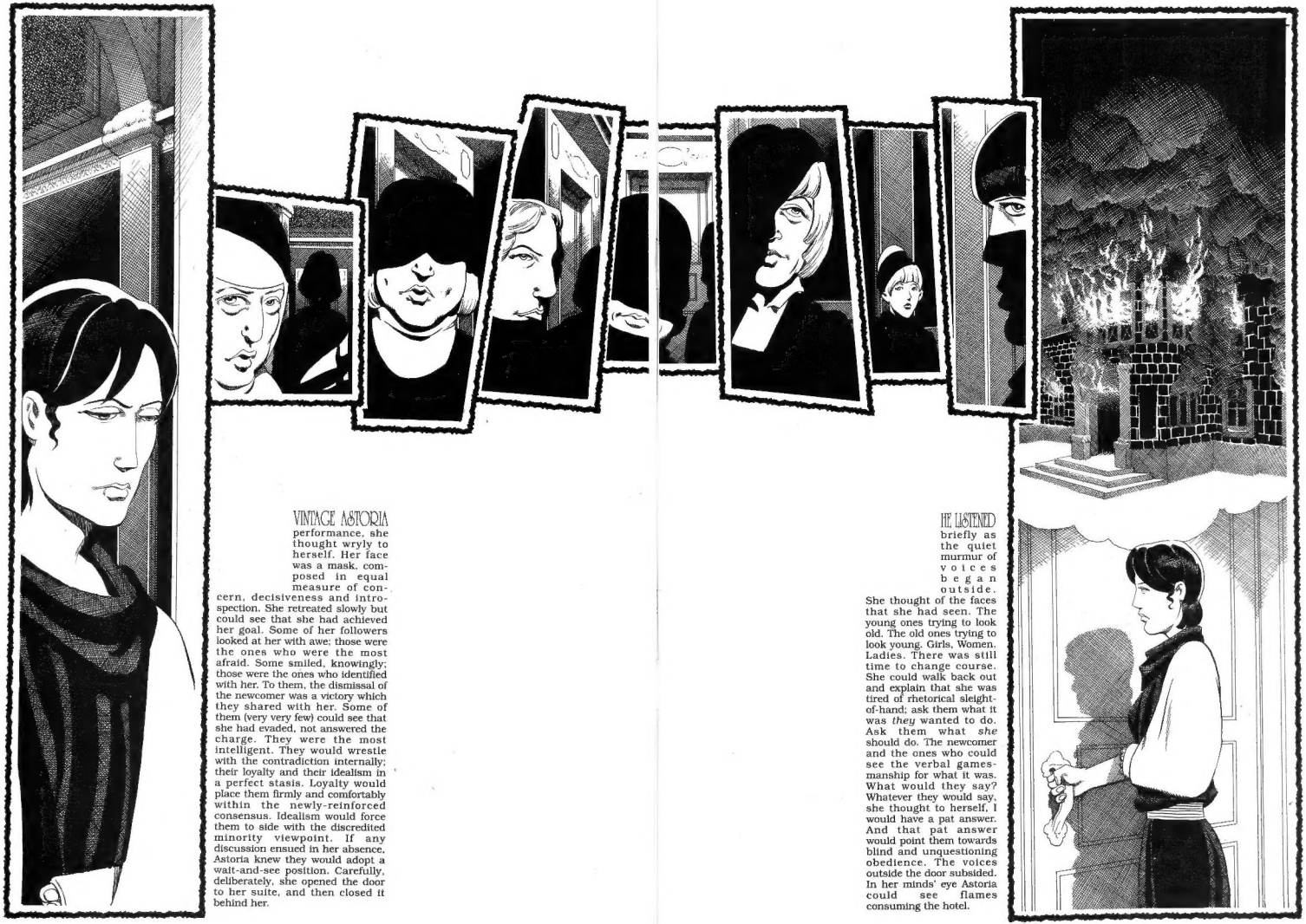
BIRMINGHAM
SEPTEMBER 24
FANTASTIC STORE

NOTTINGHAM
SEPTEMBER 25
FANTASTIC STORE

SALISBURY
SEPTEMBER 29
FLOPPY TONGUES


YOU ARE TO BE COMMENDED FOR YOUR LOYALTY! ALL IS WELL! MY INJURIES ARE MINOR -- ASTORIA! I CALL UPON YOU AND YOUR FELLOW CONSPIRATORS TO SURRENDER PEACEFULLY BY SUNSET TODAY! YOU CANNOT DEFY THE LAW NO HARM WILL COME TO YOU -- ALL IS WELL! ALL IS WELL! ALL IS WELL!


LOOK!
LEMME PUT IT TO YUH THIS WAY...
DO YUH REMEMBER BEING A BARTENDER FUH SQUIRRELS B'FORE RIGHT NOW?
HANH?
Uh.. no.
ALL RIGHT! WELL THAT SHOULD TELL YUH SUMTHIN' RIGHT THERE SHOULN'T IT?
SUM BUDDY-- AN' I AIN'T SAYIN' WHO-- IS PLAYIN' YOU FER A CHUMP.
THIS IS SUPPOSE TA BE YOUR REALM
DREAMS! GEDDIT?
Yes.
I... remember. I am...
$WOON
BY THE WAY...
I'LL TAKE ANOTHER LIGHT ALE
HEY!
YO PUT A HEAD ON IT AGAIN!
WHUPPD'IT I TELL YA LAST TIME?
sorry.
NO BIG DEAL..
S'WHERE WUZ I?
OH, YEAH.
IF YOU'RE REALLY THE LORD OF DREAMS Y'GONNA HAVE T'BE MORE ASSERTIVE..



VINTAGE ASTORIA performance, she thought wryly to herself. Her face was a mask, composed in equal measure of concern, decisiveness and introspection. She retreated slowly but could see that she had achieved her goal. Some of her followers looked at her with awe; those were the ones who were the most afraid. Some smiled, knowingly; those were the ones who identified with her. To them, the dismissal of the newcomer was a victory which they shared with her. Some of them (very very few) could see that she had evaded, not answered the charge. They were the most intelligent. They would wrestle with the contradiction internally; their loyalty and their idealism in a perfect stasis. Loyalty would place them firmly and comfortably within the newly-reinforced consensus. Idealism would force them to side with the discredited minority viewpoint. If any discussion ensued in her absence, Astoria knew they would adopt a wait-and-see position. Carefully, deliberately, she opened the door to her suite, and then closed it behind her.

HE LISTENED briefly as the quiet murmur of voices began outside. She thought of the faces that she had seen. The young ones trying to look old. The old ones trying to look young. Girls, Women. Ladies. There was still time to change course. She could walk back out and explain that she was tired of rhetorical sleight-of-hand; ask them what it was *they* wanted to do. Ask them what *she* should do. The newcomer and the ones who could see the verbal gamesmanship for what it was. What would they say? Whatever they would say, she thought to herself, I would have a pat answer. And that pat answer would point them towards blind and unquestioning obedience. The voices outside the door subsided. In her minds' eye Astoria could see flames consuming the hotel.